

Pima County Truancy Program

Members of the law enforcement community, community organizations, and the schools in Pima County have combined in a unique and truly effective program, The Pima County Truancy Program or ACT (Abolish Chronic Truancy) Now. The ACTNow Program demonstrates that through combined community efforts, quality programs accomplish goals. The goal of the program was to reduce chronic truancy through education, intervention, and prosecution. The Truancy program is an innovative public-private partnership, and uses a variety of approaches to impress upon students and parents the importance of regular school attendance. In addition to accepting school referrals, ACTNow conducts periodic multi-agency truancy "sweeps" and assists parents on a walk-in basis.

During the 1997-98 school year, thousands of letter were sent by the schools notifying parents of truancy problems, and informing them of the requirement of the law. After the families had been notified, sweeps were carried out to identify truant and return them to schools. The truancy sweeps are a prime example of the cooperative effort between the many agencies involved. Through coordination of numerous commissioned police personnel in several jurisdictional districts, officers check malls, parks, bus stops, downtown areas, and fast food restaurants to locate truant children who are then brought to a designated location by police and probation officers. Juvenile Court authorities determine if the truant is involved in other pending Juvenile matters. School authorities check on enrollment and determine whether the child is a chronic truant. Following record checks, the child is next interviewed while 88-Crime, Victim/Witness and Community outreach personnel make phone contact with parents. The Arizona Rangers and the Police Assist Group take control of the juveniles until their parents arrive. Pima County Attorney's Office investigators release juveniles to the parents. Should the juveniles need lunch while waiting for their parents, lunches are furnished by the jail or school districts.

Agencies vital to the success of this outstanding program are: the Center for Juvenile Alternatives, Pima County Attorney's Office, Pima County Juvenile Courts, Pima County Probation Offices, Pima County Juvenile Courts, Pima County School Districts and their Superintendents at Alter Valley, Amphitheater, Catalina Foothills, Flowing Wells, Sunnyside, Tanque Verde, Vail, and Marana. Law enforcement agencies participating include the Arizona Department of Public Safety, Pima County Sheriff, GITEM Task Force, the Arizona Rangers, Tucson Police Assist Group, and the police departments of Marana, Oro Valley, Tucson, and South Tucson.

Nearly 500 children and their parents were referred to the Center for Juvenile Alternatives for help by the participating school districts. The success rate in returning these children to school and avoiding further truancy was 53%. The remaining 232 cases along with 114 citations issued during the truancy sweeps were sent to the Pima County Attorney's Office. Convictions were obtained in 81 cases, and 132 cases are still pending. The result of the ACTNow program has been a reported increase in school attendance rates, indicating that this cooperative partnership is attaining its goal of reducing truancy.